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Statement submitted by International Federation for Family Development, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is being issued without formal editing.

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Statement

After 193 world leaders adopted the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the United Nations Development Programme will support governments around the world in tackling the 17 new Sustainable Development Goals. The Goals aim to end poverty, hunger and inequality, take action on climate change and the environment, improve access to health and education, build strong institutions and partnerships, and more.

Over many decades, the United Nations has proven to be the main empowering institution to protect human rights, improve the role of the world's women and nurture the next generation through the work on youth. Within the Goals, a family approach is a step forward to the long-standing efforts of the United Nations intended to remove all barriers and ensure the active participation of families in society, especially with regard to decisions on investments in health, housing and education.

As it has been stated in different documents, families have a crucial role in social development. They bear the primary responsibility for the education and socialization of children as well as instilling values of citizenship and belonging in the society. Families provide material and non-material care and support to members, from children to older persons and those suffering from illness, sheltering them from hardship to the maximum possible extent. The very achievement of development goals depends on how well families are empowered to contribute to the achievement of those goals. Thus, policies focusing on improving the well-being of families are certain to benefit development. Henceforward, to most effectively reach the Goals and ensure that no one is left behind, we are arguing that we will have to do a better job in leaving no family behind.

Our Federation has been working persistently in this family approach and has recently organized its 19th International Family Congress in Mexico City in October 2015. The Congress hosted 1,836 delegates from 43 countries. In the final Declaration, the delegates emphasized that families have a crucial role in social development and confirmed their commitment to helping families worldwide and to contributing to universal peace and respect for human rights through Family Enrichment Courses and other programmes.

The Declaration was presented in February 2016 at the 54th session of the Commission for Social Development and fully explained in a side-event themed "Leaving no family behind" at United Nations Headquarters. Delegates to the Congress welcomed the recognition within the new Goals, specifically 1 to 5, and that the very design, development, implementation and monitoring of family-oriented policies and programmes are essential for the success of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Various recommendations included in the Declaration help to achieve Goals 1 and 2, when considering the family as a unit in which the well-being of their individual members is promoted, while a breakdown can be both a root cause and an effect of poverty. A range of family-oriented policies play a vital role in tackling the intergenerational transmission of poverty, which also includes children's health, development in nutrition and families' financial resources and behaviours.

A family approach also helps to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being at all ages (Goal 3) when the family facilitates intergenerational solidarity. Therefore, appropriate policies and programmes should be focussed on promoting equitable access to resources that strengthen family ties, such as family enrichment courses, positive parenting classes or mentoring programmes; to encouraging volunteering of older persons in schools, community service for high-school students, and young people helping older persons with their daily activities.

The SDGs also reinforce the family approach by mentioning cohesive families. Cohesive families are said to provide a nurturing environment to children and youth, for the full realization of their rights and capabilities. They also are a meeting point for generations offering inclusive and equitable quality education at all levels for all people, irrespective of sex, age, race, ethnicity, and including persons with disabilities, migrants, indigenous peoples, especially those in vulnerable situations.

Furthermore, addressing cohesive families promotes gender equality and empowerment of women by recognizing the value of unpaid care, domestic work and the economic dimension of their activity (Goal 5). It is in such an environment where girls and boys are treated equally and parents share care and household responsibilities. Policymakers may find in cohesive families a potential way to contribute to the achievement of several sustainable development goals and targets.

All the efforts made to protect human rights for women and young people could be enriched by adding the family as a political priority. A family approach would represent a logical step forward to ensure that no one is left behind, especially women and young people who are naturally part of the family and proven to be the most vulnerable. This family empowerment would promote policies at the national, regional and international levels by removing social, political, legal and economic barriers to their active participation in society. Such a step forward would enable families to assert greater control over their resources and life choices and by providing instruments to recognize the time, effort and money that committed families invest in their children.

Since policymakers may encounter difficulty valuing families and people, our Federation is promoting the project, Making Families a Cornerstone in Policymaking: A Global Guide for Policymakers on Family Impact. In this project the family impact lens pays attention to relationships between people and the fact that family policies are most effective when targeting the family unit and its dynamic as a whole, rather than focusing on the needs of individual family members, as a recent Report of the United Nations Secretary General said. Yet, this conceptual distinction is often overlooked in policy discourse and decision-making. Policies too often ignore the family unit and continue to target individuals.

The value of elevating families in policymaking is supported by a solid body of research evidence that endorses families as a fundamental component of a strong and vital society. Families are a cornerstone for generating the productive workers that a sound economy demands and for rearing the caring, committed citizens that a strong society requires. For example, researchers have documented the valuable contribution families make in promoting their members' academic success, economic productivity, emotional well-being, and social competence among other outcomes of interest. In addition, professionals who educate, administer, or deliver services to families espouse the desirability and viability of family-focused approaches for more effectively and efficiently achieving program goals.

Furthermore, dialogue and partnerships between social policy makers and relevant stakeholders, including families, family associations, the business sector, trade unions and employers should be enhanced to develop and improve family-friendly policies and practices in the workplace. This should include both housework and care, because, in reality, both are a form of care, housework having important implications for the well-being of all members of the family.

How can this be achieved? A proposal includes three very clear recommendations: policies to promote education about freedom and rights; information and advice regarding responsibility and duties; and legislation on both these areas. Sound family policies must be based on adequate research and analysis. Family policy monitoring and evaluation is also indispensable to advance policy development; continue policies that work and discontinue those that have proven ineffective. Support data collection and research on family issues and the impact of public policy on families and invest in family-oriented policies and programme design, implementation and evaluation.

According to the recent resolutions of the Commission for Social Development and the Commission for Population and Development, an evidence-based approach is definitive to policy development, monitoring, review and follow-up. There never will be a family perspective without measurement tools. That is why we promote the definition of evidence-based quantification of family impact according to Global Well-Being Indicators. The scope should be both narrow and broad with a Telescopic focus on families, and a Kaleidoscopic examination of both family policies intentionally designed to improve family functions and prevent dysfunctions; and any policy that inadvertently influences family functioning and decision-making. In a few words, we are promoting the concept that families are what to think about and that the family impact lens is how to think in a more holistic way that recognizes the importance of commitment to others, which is first learned and practiced in families.

Evidence-based Global Family Well-Being indicators are projected to be an outcome of a research-based method that critically examines the past, present, or probable future effects of a policy on family relationships, family stability, family members' ability to carry out their responsibilities, and so forth. Analysis of family impact can help policymakers to better grasp how strong families support societies and how societies can support strong families. The goal is to turn family rhetoric into reality. To use the family impact lens to shift the current rhetoric from merely appreciating families in the abstract to substantively viewing families in more pragmatic, accurate, and effective ways.

Our initial thinking is outlined below on how we plan to encourage the world's decision makers to view policies through family-coloured glasses. That is, developing policies that create the conditions for families to thrive and that consider any policy for its impact on families:

1. Develop culturally appropriate principles and indicators that will serve as the core for a family impact checklist that builds on the knowledge and experience of family experts from around the world; we will begin with (but not be limited to) principles such as family responsibility, family stability, family relationships, family diversity, and family engagement.

2. Our work will target family policies designed to promote the best interests of families. Also, we will focus on other policies that may not specifically address family interests, yet may have inadvertent consequences for them. For example, we will conduct family impact analysis on three or four 2015 sustainable development goals. We will strive to incorporate these findings into United Nation's capacity building efforts and communicate these findings to the policymakers who are developing implementation plans.

3. Pilot test different methods for bringing the family impact lens to policy and practice with our partners in academia and civil society in different countries around the world in those jurisdictions where family policies are made; because policymakers typically seek out information in the context of trusted relationships, pilot tests will focus on jurisdictions where our partners have established trusting relationships with policymakers.

4. Produce brief, accessible publications targeted to the issues and decisions policymakers face in their jobs such as why family impact is important, how policymakers can examine family impacts of policy decisions, in what ways the family impact lens has benefited policy decisions around the world, and so forth.

5. Develop a toolkit that can be used as a prototype to encourage more widespread adoption of the family impact framework and methods.

6. Evaluate whether our efforts are reaching our goals of encouraging policymakers to view issues through the lens of family impact, incorporate family considerations into their jobs, and take steps to build better public policies for families.

7. Plan for dissemination through the development of resources, both written and video that capture how much can be accomplished and what can be learned in the pilot tests and evaluations.

8. Build on what is learned to vision what strategies and leadership are needed to promote widespread global adoption of the family impact framework.

If we really want to leave no family behind, we need to define the right well-being indicators needed to assess the impact of implementing a family perspective. From a Universal Human Rights perspective, it is also necessary that these indicators should be globally pertinent in the definition, but locally appropriate in the application.